



OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
REMITTING FEVER,
WHICH PREVAILED IN THE
CITY OF ALBANY,
IN THE SUMMER AND AUTUMN OF 1809.

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OBSERVATIONS, &c.

THE last winter was remarkably cold and severe. The spring was also cold and dry. Vegetation did not come forward as early as usual. Very little rain fell from the breaking up of winter, until about the 10th of July; at which time it began to rain, and continued without much intermission, for about fourteen days. At the same time the weather was so cold, that warm clothing and good fires were almost as comfortable as in winter.

This continuance of rain, caused the Hudson's river to overflow its banks, and do much damage in the low lands to grass, grain, &c.

In this place, the docks were covered, the cellars in the lower part of the city filled with water, and all low places inundated: many of which could not be drained; and the water was left to stagnate and to be exposed to the sun.

The latter end of July, a remitting fever began to make its appearance, which has continued through the season, till this time (Jan. 1, 1810.) However, the cases now are comparatively but very few.

The summer has been remarkably cool; there having been but few days but what

fire has been comfortable some part of the twenty-four hours.

There has been but very little rain from the rainy season above mentioned, until this time.

THE SYMPTOMS.

At the commencement of this fever, the patient generally makes but very little complaint, for the first two or three days. In some cases, however, the attack has been more violent. The patient complains of a general heaviness and languor, with some loss of appetite, and supposes he has taken cold.

But on the third, or fourth day, he feels an unusual weight on the back of his neck, as if pressed with a yoke; with some degree of stiffness, and soreness in the muscles of the part when he attempts to move.

In some cases there is an unusual dull, heavy pain at the stomach.

This symptom was very distressing to me in this fever. At times my distress from this cause was so great that it was with much difficulty I could get my breath.

It appeared to me, from the sensation, as if a cord was fastened to the vertebræ, and, passing up thro' my body, passing out at the inferior end of the sternum; and that a person was standing on my breast and pulling up by this cord.

A painful sensation of fullness is felt in the abdomen, and especially in the region of the liver; with a pressure upward against the diaphragm, so as to render sitting very uneasy.

A costive habit, dryness of skin, and tongue somewhat furred with a whitish coat, was observable.

Pain in the loins and inferior extremities, was generally complained of.

The pulse in general full and strong.

In the first stage of the fever, (in general,) not much pain in the head, but in the progress of the fever, there was some pain of the head, attended with a loss of memory and dizziness.

In many instances, high inflammatory symptoms, so as to render repeated bleeding necessary.

In one instance, I was obliged to take about three pounds of blood in the course of two days, before these symptoms gave way.

Urine in small quantity, and very high coloured, of a redish yellow.

In all the cases I have met with, there was evidently an inflammatory diathesis.

In those cases where I took blood, it exhibited an inflammatory buff, similar to what appears in blood drawn in a pleurisy.

In some cases, there was a remarkable constipated state of the bowels, requiring the

same powerful means to obviate it as is necessary in a bilious colic.

In one of these cases, the medicines not operating in due season, and my patient being in great distress, I recollected what that true student of nature, Dr. Rush, had observed upon a similar point, and finding that my patient's pulse would admit of the loss of blood, I immediately opened a vein, and while the blood was running he called for the close stool, and had a large and free discharge from his bowels, which gave him immediate relief: and the medicine then had such a thorough operation as to effect a complete cure, although it was the first dose he had taken.

METHOD OF CURE.

As to this, as far as I have been able to obtain information, I expect that there has been a great difference in opinion among the physicians of this city, with regard to the treatment of this disease.

I understand that some have placed their dependence on the free use of mercury, so as to produce a full and free salivation, and this continued to a great degree, &c. But as to the success of this practice, and its consequences, I leave for others to decide upon, since, according to my ideas of the nature of this disease, this practice did not appear to me to be indicated.

Not having had an opportunity of knowing precisely the opinions of other physicians as to the nature of this fever, and their mode of treatment, I shall confine myself to the method I have adopted, with my reasons for so doing, together with its effects.

I have long been of opinion, that nature does point out by certain characteristic symptoms, in all diseases; the part, or parts affected, and the nature and extent of that affection; together with the method of treatment most proper for her relief.

I do not say, that all diseases are curable : but experience has already proved that many diseases have become curable, which had been thought incurable in ages past.

I am therefore led to believe that no disease is necessarily incurable : but am very willing to suppose that many prove so, in consequence of the imperfection of the medical art. Hence I think that this should be the physician's motto, viz. "*Nature is the Guide.*"

If, therefore, after all the advantages we may have had as physicians, in our medical studies, in knowing the opinions of both dead and living authors, if we are not able, in some measure, independent of other men's opinions, to read and understand the book of *Nature* for ourselves ; that is, at the bed side, to comprehend, and understand, by the characters, or symptoms nature there exhibits, and in con-

sequence of this be enabled to administer by prescribing for the symptoms, instead of the name of a disease, and in this way in subservience to nature afford relief; I fear it will not be in our power to do much good to our patients, or add much to the common stock of real medical knowledge, for the good of society, or the benefit of those who may come after us.

There are two things which stand in the way of mankind's acquiring true and useful knowledge, viz. indolence, and credulity. Yet many are fond of being thought wise men, and for this purpose clothe themselves with a fine borrowed dress, and, like the butterfly, sport in the rays of the sun, in order to dazzle the eyes of the multitude; but, when weighed in the balance of true merit, they are found wanting, and like the meteor, soon sink in night: having been too indolent to descend into the shade of the valley and there to have pursued nature in her humble path, for the purpose of obtaining truth and real science for themselves. But rather being willing to indulge their credulity and receive for facts what they have gotten by rote, and thus imagine themselves very wise, and learned, in being able to retail what other men have known, and said, instead of making this only, a foundation on which to raise the superstructure for themselves, from their own experience, observation, and knowledge.

My particular attention having been called to the phenomena attending this fever as above recited, it appeared evident to me, that there was a congestion of blood in the abdominal viscera.

When we consider the severity of the last winter, the coldness of the spring, together with the cold rainy season immediately preceding the commencement of this fever; and I might add the conformity of dress to the season of the year, rather than to the state of the weather: all these circumstances tending to check perspiration and prevent a free circulation of blood to the surface of the body: furthermore, agreeable to the law of fluids; which press in every direction equally where the resistance is the same; yet if there is a resistance in one part, and less in another, fluids will be congested where there is the least resistance.

There was a remarkable sensation of fulness in the abdomen which gave the patient much uneasiness.

Although there was also a costive habit, this symptom did not altogether depend on that circumstance; for in many instances, although the bowels had been freely evacuated, this symptom was not relieved until blood was freely taken, although there was no fixed pain in any particular part.

This point may be further elucidated by adverting to the anatomy of the parts, and the

economy of nature. “ The branches of the cœliac and mesenteric arteries distribute their contents to the stomach, intestines, pancreas, and spleen, besides the hepatic artery which supplies the liver with blood for its nourishment. The blood circulating through all these viscera excepting the liver, being returned by their respective veins, is poured into their common trunk, the vena portarum ; thus the origin of the vena portarum appears to consist in the concurrence of all the veins of the peritonæal viscera except the liver.”* If therefore there existed any obstruction in the liver to prevent the free return of blood from those parts to the heart, the consequence must be a congestion of blood in the abdominal viscera. From the phenomena attending this fever, that appeared evidently to me to be the fact.

The peculiar anatomy of the liver, with its secretions, and excretions, together with the qualities, the use, and the importance of the bile in the animal economy ; and the effect of a disordered state of the liver, on the rest of the body, and especially on the rest of the glandular system ; appears to me to have been too much overlooked in the doctrine of diseases in general.

That there was a congestion of blood in the abdominal viscera, is further evinced by the

* See Saunders on the Liver.

discharge of blood from the bowels, which took place in some cases which appeared to be critical, giving relief to the patient, although the quantity was so great as to cause serious apprehensions that the patient would sink under the loss of so much blood.

I think however I am correct in saying that this symptom only made its appearance in some full habits where there had not been sufficient evacuations from the bowels and the vessels not having been relieved by bleeding.

A constipated state of the bowels was another symptom which claimed peculiar attention in this disease.

When food is taken into the stomach and digestion has taken place, it passes the pylorus and enters the duodenum, at which place the chyle begins to be taken up by the lacteal vessels. to be conveyed into the receptaculum chyli, and from thence conveyed by the thoracic duct into the left subclavian vein to be mixed with the circulating mass of blood.

Now a certain time will be necessary for the lacteals to perform this office after every meal.

It then will follow that if there is a morbid excitement as to the peristaltic motion of the intestines, their contents will be too suddenly evacuated, hence a part of the chyle will be discharged with the excrementitious part, and the system deprived of that proportion of nour-

ishment it otherwise might have had. On the other hand, if the peristaltic motion of the intestines be retarded, and what nature designed as excrement be too long retained in the intestines, the lacteal vessels continuing their action; a portion of excrementitious matter will be taken up and conveyed into the circulating mass of blood, which will act as a poison, and produce a disturbance to nature, and prove a source of irritation and fever.

This is not the only thing to be taken into consideration; for it is evident to reason, that if excrement be retained too long in the intestines, there will be a congestion of morbid matter, which will not only act as a septic poison, but as an extraneous body producing uneasiness and disturbance throughout the whole system.

From the symptoms above enumerated it was evident to me that there was a want of action in the glandular system in general, and especially of the liver: for, although there was some bile secreted in the liver, it was a morbid secretion, which did not possess healthy qualities, hence there was a want of healthy and natural stimulus to promote a regular peristaltic motion of the intestines, so that the bowels might evacuate their contents in due season. Nor is this the only important use of the bile.

From experiments it is found to possess powerful antiseptic qualities, it is therefore of

the greatest consequence to our health and well being, in order to correct the septic acid in the intestines from which arises most of those distressing pains of the bowels in the colic, dysentery, cholera morbus, and in many other diseases. This septic acid is the natural consequence of the process of digestion of our aliment : hence it is, that in a state of health, that when the stomach is filled with food, it presses the liver and gall bladder, procuring a discharge of both cystic, and hepatic bile, to be poured into the duodenum to be mixed with the digested matter, as well as to flow round it to give the natural stimulus to the bowels and keep up the peristaltic motion of the intestines.

The bile in its healthy state contains a gummy, resinous and bitter substance, together with a saponaceous and alkaline quality, and may be considered as nature's physic. (See Saunders on the liver.) From these considerations we find the bile of much consequence in the animal economy : therefore, instead of considering it as our enemy, we may think it one of our best friends, without which we cannot possess that most invaluable blessing, health of body. If this doctrine be true, we may perceive the folly of searching the *Materia Medica* for medicines to destroy the bile, since the very diseases these medicines are designed to cure, arise from a want of a suffi-

cient quantity of healthy bile for the purposes above stated.

There is one thing more however respecting the use of the bile which is worthy of notice.

The bile in its healthy state, and in due quantity, renders the excrements soluble, similar to what we see to be the effect of good yeast mixed with flour and water in the process of making bread: and any person of observation may judge of the healthy state of his liver, and of its secretions, and excretions from this circumstance.

I have for many years been of opinion that the liver in some way or other must take the lead of, and govern the rest of the glands, and also the lymphatic system. One reason among many others was, that in cases where mercury was given so as powerfully to excite the salivary glands, yet it did not relieve obstructions of the liver: but on the other hand, where there were obstructions of the liver, accompanied with a torpid state of the glandular system, by removing the obstructions of the liver, the rest of the glandular, and even the lymphatic systems, yielded their consent. This observation then will serve in some measure as a reason for my objecting to producing a salivation in the disease under consideration especially; as well as in all others where there exists any obstruction

of the liver : for it is making use of secondary, and insufficient means, instead of those which will effect the object at once, not to mention the painful situation a person must be in, to go through a course of salivation ; and in many instances its very disagreeable effects.

From the symptoms and facts above enumerated it was evident to me that there was a torpid state of the liver, hence a deficiency in its secretions and excretions, also attended with some degree of tumefaction, and a want of a sufficient quantity of healthy bile conveyed into the duodenum in order to keep up the peristaltic motion of the intestines, so that the bowels might evacuate their contents in due season.

From hence, therefore, I suppose that a constive habit was necessarily the consequence.

As above stated when the symptoms required it, I took blood. I then gave calomel ppt : gr. 20 and vitr : cerat : antim : gr. 10, directing my patients to drink freely of thin water-gruel during its operation. These medicines I have been in the habit of using in this manner about fourteen years. I was first led to their use from my own reasoning with respect to their effects when given separately, and from hence I concluded by uniting such valuable medicines much benefit might be derived ; the trial has not disappointed my

expectation. I know not if any other physicians have made the same trial of these medicines thus united, except a few to whom I have made the communication.

My experience of the efficacy of these medicines therefore dictated my using them in this disease.

This dose generally operated freely by puking and also by purging.

The matter thrown off the stomach was green and slimy, resembling frog spawn at first, but in many instances towards the last of the operation they threw up yellow bile ; which I suppose was brought from the liver in the act of puking. For wherever I saw this take place, I found those symptoms of glandular obstruction to give way and my patients found great relief. The matter also evacuated from the bowels was of a dark bottle green colour, and in some instances almost black.

In many cases where this dose had a thorough effect, so as to discharge yellow bile from the stomach ; and also keep up the discharge from the bowels until the appearance of the stools was changed from a dark green, to that of a yellow appearance, one single dose would perform the cure.

This was the case with myself, the dose puked me about 12 times with a great deal of ease, and at last I threw off yellow bile from

my stomach ; it then operated as a cathartic 16 or 17 times until the discharge from the bowels also changed to a yellow colour. I then got complete relief and really felt stronger and better able to perform any exercise than I did before I took the medicine, and was able to go out and to attend to my business.

At evening after giving this dose I directed my patients to bathe their feet and legs in warm soap suds, and if any pain in the head to apply sinapi-ms to the feet, and drink freely of some cooling drink, as baum tea.

If much fever I gave powders of sal Nitre and Tart : Antim : every two hours in the above tea.

If the first dose however was not thus thorough in its operation, I gave another the next day ; and I found by observation that it was necessary to increase the second dose notwithstanding the first dose had operated considerable freely . For I found more difficulty in procuring a free discharge from the bowels afterwards, in case the first dose did not produce the thorough effect above mentioned ; and where this was the case, in consequence of an increased insensibility, and want of action in the glandular system, and of the intestines : I gave (as recommended by Dr. Rush in the yellow fever) jalap and calomel gr. 10 of each every two hours until a free and thorough dis-

charge was produced, and until there was an evident appearance of yellow bile.

The sooner this could be effected the better, and until this was done, nothing was effected to any purpose.

I have never found any disease (in the course of almost thirty years practice) which required more free and thorough evacuations than in this fever.

After this point was gained the fever with all its symptoms easily yielded to the common antiphlogistic treatment. Although it continued in many cases, more or less until the fourteenth day, at which time a crisis generally took place.

In some cases where there had been the greatest difficulty in procuring a free evacuation from the bowels; at or about the time of the usual crisis a very considerable discharge of blood by stool took place attended with dysenteric symptoms; this circumstance was alarming to the patient and friends: however from observation, I was convinced that it proceeded from a plethoric state of the abdominal viscera, together with a constipated state of the bowels, and in not having been able to procure a thorough discharge soon enough as above hinted. I therefore gave laxative medicines and directed the free use of glysters of mutton broth, and flannel cloths wet in brandy applied to the bowels; which soon had the desired effect of giving relief.

After the crisis had taken place I found one thing worthy of remark, viz. that uniformly patients could take neither the bark nor wine ; but received great benefit from weak brandy and water (the brandy however was of the best kind ;) and from a decoction of a small yellow root which grows in cold wet land, commonly known by the name of gold thread. This for several years I have made use of, and found it a very excellent tonic in many cases. The patients (generally) soon got an appetite for food, and in the course of a few days recovered their strength and spirits : and to use their own words “ much better health than usual.”

I have continued this simple mode of treatment through the season to this time, having found no occasion to alter it, being so fortunate as not to have lost a single patient of this disease. The number of cases which has fallen under my care has been seventy-six.

ALBANY, January 1, 1810.



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